

## Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee **ANIMAL CARE INFORMATION SHEET**

This document provides comprehensive guidelines on the care, housing, and ethical consideration for the care and maintenance of the dog's health and wellbeing.

### Therapy / Support Dogs



<b>Scientific Name:</b>	<b>Various</b>
<b>Activities requiring School Principal approval only:</b>	The appropriate care of the wellbeing/support dog.
<b>Approval Level:</b>	Where an activity is not listed in this <b>Animal Care Information Sheet (ACIS)</b> , advice must be sought from the Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee (NGSAEC) before it can be undertaken.
<b>Authority:</b>	<b>Independent and Catholic Schools</b> Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee.
<b>Disclaimer:</b>	This document will be reviewed annually. You should check the website regularly to ensure that you are meeting the most recent recommendations. If you note any concerns with the information provided (inadequate, incorrect) please contact the NGSAEC.
<b>Licensing Requirement:</b>	If you intend to use these animals for teaching purposes you must be licenced to do so by the Minister. A Licence is separate to seeking pre-approval from the NGSAEC for an activity.
<b>Compliance Requirement:</b>	The keeping of any wellbeing / support dog requires approval from the school principal. It is recommended that this <b>Animal Care Information Sheet (ACIS)</b> be followed as a minimum in the provision of appropriate care and housing for this species.
<b>General Information:</b>	<p>Therapy / support dogs are different from assistance dogs, which are regarded as medical aids and have guaranteed public access rights under the <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1991 (Cth)</i>.</p> <p>There are specific risks to be considered and managed when employing therapy / support dogs in a school context.</p> <p>Therapy / support dogs should be trained for that purposes, and pet dogs belonging to staff and students should not be on school grounds.</p> <p>Catholic Safety Health and Welfare SA has prepared a template risk assessment to assist schools using or intending to use therapy / support dogs.</p> <p>Schools are encouraged to involve third parties like Dogs Connect for guidance and risk assessment.</p> <p>It is recommended that all staff involved in the care of animals at school complete the ANZCCART online course.</p>

<b>Physical Attributes:</b>	<b>Varies</b>
<b>Environment:</b>	<p>Creating a supportive and effective environment for therapy / support dogs in schools involves careful consideration of several factors to ensure the safety, comfort, and wellbeing of both the dogs and the students. Below are some recommended environments and practices for integrating therapy/support dogs into school settings:</p> <p><b>Designated Spaces:</b> Therapy / support dogs should be placed in quiet, calm areas away from noisy, high-traffic zones like hallways or canteens. A designated room or corner of the classroom works well. This ensures the dog is not overwhelmed by noise and distractions.</p> <p>The space should be one where students are able to focus on interacting with the dog, whether it is for relaxation, emotional support, or therapeutic activities. The rooms should have adequate space for the dog to move freely and comfortably.</p> <p><b>Student to Dog Ratio:</b> Therapy / support dogs should interact with a small group of students at a time. Too many students at once can overwhelm both the dog and the children. Ideally, interactions should be one-on-one or in small groups of 3-5 students to ensure everyone has a positive experience.</p> <p><b>Supervised Interactions:</b> A trained handler, such as a certified therapy / support dog team or a school counsellor with dog therapy training should always supervise the interactions. This ensures that the dog's behaviour is monitored and that students understand how to interact with the dog appropriately.</p> <p>Teachers, administrators, or designated staff members should be present to facilitate safe and effective sessions with the therapy / support dog also.</p> <p><b>Sensory-Friendly Spaces:</b> Avoid harsh fluorescent lights and opt for soft, natural lighting or lamps. Bright or flickering lights can cause stress for both the dog and students, especially those with sensory sensitivities.</p> <p><b>Comfortable Flooring:</b> The area should have non-slippery, comfortable flooring (eg carpet, or padded mats) for the dog to walk and lie down on, reducing the risk of injury for the dog and creating a relaxed environment.</p>
<b>Accessibility Considerations:</b>	<p>Therapy / support dogs should be easily accessible to students who may benefit from them, including those with anxiety, trauma, or autism. The school environment should allow for flexible use of the therapy / support dog to meet various needs, whether it is during lessons, break times, or as a calming influence before or after difficult events.</p> <p>The environment should be adapted to be safe for all students, including those who may have allergies or phobias. Some schools use specific protocols (like a "therapy dog day") to ensure that students who need it are aware of when the therapy / support dog will be available.</p>
<b>Clear Policies for Interaction:</b>	<p>Establish clear rules regarding how students should interact with the therapy / support dog. This can include guidelines on petting, approaching the dog, and respecting the dog's space.</p> <p>Students should be taught to recognise signs that the dog may need a break, such as retreating to a quiet corner or lying down.</p>
<b>Training and Orientation for Students:</b>	<p>The space where the therapy / support dog works should be conducive to promoting positive emotional and social behaviours. Activities might include reading to the dog, using the dog as a calming presence during stressful moments, or simply sitting and interacting in a quiet, structured way.</p> <p>Use the therapy / support dog for specific therapeutic activities, such as supporting social skills, emotional regulations, or building trust and empathy.</p>

<b>Health and Safety Protocols:</b>	<p>Ensure that the therapy / support dog is regularly checked by a veterinarian for health and safety reasons, particularly of the dog interacts with many students throughout the day.</p> <p>Hand hygiene stations (eg hand sanitisers or sinks) should be readily available for students to wash their hands before and after interacting with the dog.</p>
<b>Feeding:</b>	<p>The therapy / support dog must have appropriate access to dog food throughout the day. It is the responsibility of the dog handler to provide portioned food based on the dog's age and weight. The therapy / support dog is not to eat food offered by staff or students. During interactions, the handler should encourage students and staff not to feed the therapy / support dog.</p>
<b>Toileting:</b>	<p>Toileting the therapy / support dog must be one in a way that ensures hygiene is maintained for the staff and students. The dog is not to be toileted in common seating areas for students. An arrangement is to be made between the handler of the dog and staff to identify designated areas for toileting. To ensure that the designated toileting areas do not become unhygienic, the toileting areas must be reticulated, and alternate locations used throughout the day.</p>
<b>Resources:</b>	<p>Template risk assessment ANZCCART online course Other therapy dog info</p>
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